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## IN CONVERSATION WITH: Tora Birgitte Carlsen Blyth | Glenstriven House

Following the launch of our AW25 Collection, we spoke to Tora Birgitte Carlsen Blyth, who explains the allure of her family's hideaway Scottish lodge that is the setting for Beulah London's latest campaign.

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### Tell us the story of Glenstriven House?

Glenstriven House sits on the banks of Loch Striven in Argyllshire and was built for the Glaswegian businessman Duncan Cameron Kennedy and his family in the 1860s. The property has a rich history and had only ever been owned by three families before we bought it in 2019.

The lodge has always been a welcoming family home and hosted many shooting and stalking weekends. In recent years, it has played host to a renowned pheasant shoot, which has left an extensive legacy of tracks around the surrounding hills. There are spectacular views along the loch from some of the vantage points.

But most notably, during WWII, the loch was the testing site for the famous 'bouncing bombs' that were used in the audacious Dambusters Raid in 1943. The tests were carried out in great secrecy - the household staff were sent away, and the family were ordered to stay in the back of the house under armed guard with the shutters and curtains closed, while the practice bombs (made

of concrete), were aimed at an old ship moored in the loch. You can still find black marks on the rocks by the loch from the tar that was burned to create a smokescreen to hide the tests. 0

For us, Glenstriven's history is wrapped up in the beauty and tranquillity of the surrounding 500-acre estate. Maybe surprisingly, this area of Scotland is a natural rainforest and consequently very lush – there are even palm trees growing in the garden. We are mindful of the imprint our family leaves on the land and so, with the help of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh, we've established an arboretum filled with rare trees and we've worked closely with local craft experts to reclaim and restore the house and grounds.

### **What are your favourite spots around the property?**

There are so many special places both within the house and in the grounds, but one favourite spot is a window seat in the sitting room which has the most beautiful views of the mountain reflected in the still loch waters. It is a lovely place to sit and read by the fire.

Equally, an aperitif at our private Glenstriven Arms pub is the best way to kick off a fun evening. The pub was converted from an old transformer station and is warm, snug and cosy with lots of atmospheric lighting. The perfect place for a glass of finest Scottish whisky before or after dinner.





How does the surrounding environment complement the house?

We'd like to think that it is impossible to visit Glenstriven and not fall in love with it. The house is large and elegant but also comfortable and welcoming. We installed reclaimed Jotul wood burners in many rooms, so the house always feels warm and inviting, whatever the weather. But really, it is the views and the grounds that make Glenstriven so special. And there is so much to do: you can go mushroom foraging, hiking in the mountains and deer stalking, or you can take a dip in the loch (the water is surprisingly mild) or go canoeing, paddleboarding or sailing. It is the perfect place to escape the rush of daily life and reconnect with nature.

### **How do the seasons change at Glenstriven?**

Every season brings its own beauty to Glenstriven. Autumn is a stunning time of year as the leaves start to turn. There are many different species of trees so the range of colours from palest yellows to deepest russets is amazing.

In winter, it often snows, bringing an added hush and stillness to the place. It is a time to hunker down in the house, play boardgames or billiards, followed by a short stroll to the Glenstriven Arms.

Spring and summer are all about being outside. Being so far north, the evenings are long, and we have a wonderful terrace for al fresco dining. There are thousands of rhododendron bushes that grow like weeds and the woods are full of their big purple blooms. Later in summer, the heather takes over, covering the hills in a violet haze.



## How has the house evolved?

Since we took custody of the house, we've been gradually and carefully returning it to its former glory, mixing reclaimed furniture with an earthy, natural colour palette that brings the outside in. I'm originally from Norway and my husband is British so we have combined a Nordic purity with the warmth of classic British design. We've introduced Morris & Co wallpapers and fabrics, pure wool tartans, waxed wooden floors and heritage furniture pieces that we've had re-upholstered by local craftspeople. And for our modern comfort, we've ensured each of the seven bedrooms has an en suite with a generous sized shower! In 1936, one visitor wrote of a stay at the house: "Glenstriven's magic lay in its utter peace, which overlay it like a soft, warm blanket...". We'd like to think that still rings true today.





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